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NEW BOOKS REVIEWED

VILLIERS: HIS FIVE DECADES OF ADVENTURE. By Frederic Villiers. New York: Harper & Brothers.

As regards the variety and the notability of the events described or touched upon in Mr. Villiers' two-volume autobiography, the reader will find nothing lacking. Here is the record of a life packed with adventures, any one of which would seem enough to season an ordinary life sufficiently with excitement. "There goes a man who has seen more fighting than any soldier in Europe," is a remark more than once made about Mr. Villiers—and with truth.

At the age of twenty-six he had been eye-witness to ten big battles including the second battle of Plevna. He saw fierce and bloody hill-fighting in the campaign of the English against the Afghan tribes in 1878. In 1881 he was in Egypt accompanying the British forces which suppressed the rising of Arabi Pasha; a few years later he was in the Sudan, where he was present at the fight described by Kipling in *The Light that Failed*, and where he saw the "Fuzzies" break an English square. He shared the fortunes of the Gordon Relief Expedition of 1884-85. After returning to England he was soon sent to the Balkans where he observed the Serb-Bulgar fiasco of 1886. The fourth year of his fourth decade saw him tearing across the Canadian Pacific on his way to the Far East, where he beheld the easy triumph of Japan over China. When Greece in 1897 stirred up strife with Turkey, Mr. Villiers arrived promptly on the scene, and was soon, as usual, taking a more than passive part in events.

Having been instrumental, together with the British Consul, in handing over Volo to the Turks—an act which undoubtedly saved the inhabitants of that city from outrage,—he asked for and obtained from the Turkish commander information as to where the next attack would take place, thus winning the palm among war correspondents for successful audacity. Once more in China with the Japanese forces, he described in his journal the hideous slaughter at Port Arthur. Four years later, and just thirteen years after Lord Wolseley's campaign in the Sudan, he was at Omdurman with Kitchener. He saw many of the ups and downs of the Boer War and was in at the relief of Kimberley. Finally, during 1914, he saw as much of the fighting in France as any correspondent was allowed to see.

The stories of campaigns and battles alternate with tales of peace-time experiences no less novel and colorful. A pilgrimage to Palestine, a visit to Australasia, a sojourn in New York in the 'eighties, the spectacle of a Tsar's coronation, a trip to Abyssinia taken at a time when that country was really

primitive—all these are made vivid and informing by the journalist's instinct for truth in its concrete form and by the artist's love of the picturesque; for while too few of Mr. Villiers' sketches are reproduced in these volumes, his style is generally that of one who sees with the discerning eye of the picture-maker.

Artist, journalist, soldier of fortune, worthy associate of such men as Archibald Forbes and Januarius Aloysius McGahan, Mr. Villiers seems to represent the romance of war-correspondence. It is to be hoped that he is not the last of his race! Conditions have changed, and the work of the correspondent changes with them. Chances for individual initiative, adventures that place a man at one moment in imminent danger of being shot as a spy and at the next lead him into the friendliest relations with the commanding general, odd *contretemps* with important or notorious persons, these things are sure to grow less common as war becomes more and more standardized.

Romance, of course, is something more than continuous adventure. It depends in part upon a feeling of strangeness and often upon such a feeling connected with the past. It is for this reason, perhaps, that the most fascinating pages of Mr. Villiers' book are the earliest. The author's account of the battle of Plevna seems somehow richer and in little ways more informing than his description of the taking of Port Arthur. The character sketch of Skobelev is more interesting than that of Cecil Rhodes. No other description of a country in war-time makes quite so deep an impression as that of Serbia under Milan.

In New York in the 'eighties, Mr. Villiers met General Sherman, Thomas Nast, Joseph Jefferson, Bill Nye, Edwin Booth. He visited Edison when the inventor was struggling with the problem of finding the right filament for the incandescent lamp. The scene at Menlo Park is a vivid mental illustration of history. Is it an illusion on the part of the reader, or does the author write with diminishing zest as he leaves the remoter past behind? Does not the narrative become less mellow in tone, less distinctive in its details as reminiscences give way to jottings?

There is one quality that might make up for any falling-off in purely autobiographical interest—namely, penetration. This, however, is unfortunately lacking. Mr. Villiers hardly attempts to place historical events in any striking light; he is concerned chiefly with details. More than this, his sketches of notable persons seem, though frank and well-observed, somewhat superficial. For example, the following account of Kitchener, as the great soldier was seen in Egypt soon after his final march to victory, is oddly unsatisfactory:

I hardly knew him; he was so changed. His face suggested a power that was never there in the early days. It seemed as if a new spirit had entered the man. It was a hard, impenetrable face, and the cold gray eyes, by virtue of the defect in one of them, never seemed to fix their gaze. One had the impression, when he spoke, that the eyes were either looking straight over the top of one's head or piercing one below the knees. A most useful defect, I thought, when receiving some of my colleagues bent on extracting precious news; for those eyes could never belie what the lips uttered.

This impression, while certainly not false, is curiously unconvincing. It does not get itself accepted at face value. It is like a snap-shot, in which we recognize photographic verity, but do not perceive a true likeness.

Altogether Mr. Villiers' life-story is a most interesting record; its subject-matter is striking and of no small importance; it is at times fascinating, always worth while. But as autobiography it is not first-rate.

DIPLOMATIC REMINISCENCES. By A. Nekludoff, formerly Russian Minister at Sofia and at Stockholm and Ambassador at Madrid. Translated from the French by Alexandra Paget. New York: E. P. Dutton and Company.

Like most diplomatic reminiscences, M. Nekludoff's narrative is magnificently clear—a real triumph over the difficulty of dealing with minute details and at the same time keeping larger issues well in view. It is even unusually perspicuous and plausible in its accounts of complex situations. Moreover, like nearly all books of Russian authorship it has a peculiar charm—the charm of intimate psychological analysis conducted in a spirit generally large-minded and humane. The details are never dull, and to the student of history they may prove in certain cases significant. It may be remarked, however, that neither Bulgaria nor Stockholm was very near the center of things during the war. Nor does the narrative make much clearer the general reasons for the unsuccess of Allied diplomacy in the Balkans. No really new cause comes to light. It is interesting to know, for example, that the idea of a Balkan alliance with an anti-Bulgarian foundation “certainly did not emanate from M. Sazonoff, who was unaware of it at the beginning,” but from M. Hartwig, M. Nekludoff's colleague in Belgrade—a much less responsible person. But the broad lines of policy—Russian and Austrian—are not seen differently because of this fact. Again the apathy of the Russian Foreign Office in the face of the approaching danger remains unexplained. M. Nekludoff was simply “inordinately astonished” at M. Sazonoff's indifference to his warnings.

These things are said, of course, not as criticisms of M. Nekludoff but rather as indications to the moderately well informed reader as to what he may expect in the book. On one side the reminiscences belong to the infinitely complex diplomatic material of the war history; they need to be sifted through the historian's finest sieves. But in another way they are of immediate interest. Incidentally, the author makes statements of a general character that are extremely illuminating, that curiously correct certain rather widespread notions or add new conceptions to what one supposes himself to know about Russia and the Southern Slav States.

In the first place, the character sketch of Ferdinand of Bulgaria—and it is a sketch to which touches are continually added throughout the narrative—is something of a masterpiece. Nothing else that is nearly so intimate and so convincing has been written about this neuropathic, shrewd, indecisive, but